

## **Thanet Loop Improvement Project – Traffic Regulation Order Consultation Response**

### **Funding and Background**

The Government published the National Bus Strategy (NBS) in March 2021 which set out an ambitious vision for bus services and related bus infrastructure provision across the country. Kent County Council (KCC) and all other local transport authorities were required to produce Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) to demonstrate how they would deliver the requirements and aspirations of the strategy at a local level. The Government awarded KCC funding for their BSIP in March 2023 to deliver a programme of improvements, with the Thanet Loop bus service being identified as an appropriate project for delivery using this funding.

The allocated funding is for the delivery of bus improvement initiatives which reflect the requirements of the National Bus Strategy. Therefore, funding is ringfenced for the purpose of improving the network to benefit bus services and their users. The council must comply with the requirements of the funding to unlock improved bus journey times, so cannot use this money for other improvements such as highway maintenance and repairs.

### **Thanet Loop Bus Service**

The Thanet Loop which connects Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs is the most utilised bus service in Kent, and significantly contributes to the high level of bus patronage in Thanet. The service generates a substantial level of passenger trips, equivalent to passenger loads observed in successful bus services in London. Therefore, any improvements to the reliability of this service would benefit a large number of road users. The service operates at a high frequency all week and is of key importance in increasing regional connectivity to those who use public transport as their main form of transport. Currently, congestion and pinch points on the route around Thanet reduce the reliability of the service and the ability of the bus operator to introduce service frequency increases.

### **Thanet Loop Improvement Project**

The Thanet Loop service was identified as a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) priority project following an analysis of passenger numbers, congestion hotspots and operator feedback. It was prioritised for National Bus Strategy (NBS) funding due to its potential to encourage reinvestment from its service operator, which was a key funding requirement.

To support the Thanet Loop service and following an appraisal of the highway network, work has been undertaken to develop a package of highway interventions to improve journey times and reliability of the service, as well other objectives to improve bus stop accessibility and passenger experience. The bus operator for the Thanet Loop service has committed to reinvesting potential journey time savings back into the route network, with an intention to increase bus frequency as the scheme progresses. This will improve the service offering to both existing and future bus passengers and increase the attractiveness of the route.

Schemes were identified after considering several factors which included bus service reliability statistics and the vehicle tracking movements of buses within the existing highway network. Direct feedback was also sourced from the bus operator, using information collated from their drivers who regularly travel this route and have a good understanding of current issues. Consequently, several locations on the road network have been identified as having a negative impact on bus access. It has been determined some of these would benefit from additional parking restrictions to manage the presence of parked vehicles which often impede efficient operation of the bus route.

The changes being proposed will each generate time savings, and due to the regular frequency of the service, the total journey time savings over a day/ week will be significant. There are multiple areas of new parking restrictions being proposed, and whilst in isolation each section of yellow lining would generate a small time saving for buses, collectively these will provide meaningful improvement and a better passenger experience.

### **Parking Restriction**

The project includes the introduction of a package of parking restrictions to areas of the existing highway network which were the subject of the recent Traffic Regulation Order consultation. These are necessary to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of the buses to improve journey times. Whilst the impact to parking amenity for businesses and residents has been considered by the council, it is relevant to highlight that the primary purpose of the highway is to facilitate the passing and repassing of people and vehicles. Therefore, existing parking amenity for road users must always be balanced against the merits of parking restrictions to other road users (including buses). This is particularly relevant on busy road corridors that facilitate a large number of journeys, such as the A254 Margate Road. Areas of the Thanet Loop route are often subject to considerable amounts of inconsiderate parking and the proposals seek to enforce considerate parking behaviour.

The council is aware that the introduction of double yellow lines can often be unpopular with residents and businesses, and a decision to impose them is not taken without careful consideration. However, there are sound reasons for introducing the parking restrictions. The removal of access bottlenecks caused by parked vehicles will help to improve journey time speed and reliability of buses.

Many of the proposed areas for parking restriction are located close to road junctions and traffic islands. These are areas where parking can create an increased risk of vehicle and pedestrian safety issues. There are also several locations where inconsiderate parking regularly occurs on existing white hatching road markings, which is intended to discourage parking and blocking of pedestrian routes. There are also several locations where parking impedes the flow of traffic or the ingress and egress of buses at bus stops. This can also have a negative impact on passengers accessing and alighting buses.

### **Displaced Parking**

There are multiple locations where new parking restrictions being proposed within the A254 Margate Road corridor to assist the safe and efficient movement of buses. The project team has a good knowledge of the local area and is confident that sufficient parking opportunities would remain within a reasonable walking distance from the proposed restrictions to accommodate their introduction.

### **Parking Enforcement**

Thanet District Council (TDC) as the local parking authority has responsibility for undertaking parking enforcement within the district. Their Civil Enforcement Officers will issue a penalty charge notice when a vehicle is found parked in contravention of new and existing parking restrictions. To make both new and existing parking restrictions more effective, engagement with TDC is ongoing to foster an improved enforcement regime on the Thanet Loop bus route.

### **Safety and Speed**

Kent County Council are not proposing any speed limit changes as part of this project. All existing requirements for road users to comply with posted speed limits and drive safely remain. The introduction of

parking restrictions is not expected to encourage contravention of existing speed limits by road users but will create a more streamlined access route for buses and larger vehicles by removing obstacles and pinch points, which is likely to benefit the operation of the road network.

The council has sought to limit the introduction of parking restrictions, and many areas of existing parking as well as the existing traffic islands will still be maintained. The proposed measures will also provide an opportunity to improve sight lines and reduce the conflict points between parked cars and large vehicles along main carriageways, as well as provide safety benefits at existing road junctions by improving visibility for both vehicles and pedestrians. It is not anticipated that the proposed measures will negatively impact on road safety.

### **Impact on Businesses on Margate Road**

Kent County Council has received multiple objections referencing businesses on A254 Margate Road. The proposed parking restrictions in this area are necessary in response to the problems created by inconsiderate parking near junctions, traffic islands and on white hatching, which subsequently increase the risk to highway safety and impact on the free flow of vehicles (including buses). While the immediate area around businesses will see a small net reduction in areas of highway currently used for parking, many of the proposed parking restrictions encompass areas where vehicles are often parked in an unsafe location. The council considers that there are sufficient safe and convenient alternative parking opportunities within the surrounding highway network to accommodate and displaced parking, therefore the proposals are unlikely to impact on the attractiveness of local businesses to potential customers.

### **Requests for Compensation**

Kent County Council, like all Highway Authorities accept that parking will often occur on the highway, however it is important this is done without hindrance to the efficient passing and repassing of users, which is the primary function of the highway. There is no absolute right for parking within the highway network for road users and as such, the council does not provide compensation when parking restrictions are imposed, as they support the primary function of the highway.

### **Loading/ Deliveries**

The proposed yellow lines do not include any loading prohibitions. This means that providing there is no obstruction which hinders the free flow of traffic or creates a safety issue, short term loading would still be possible. Residents may stop to load and unload, vehicles can stop while passengers get into or out of the vehicle, and blue badge holders can park for up to three hours provided they do not create an obstruction to traffic or create a safety issue.

### **Disabled Residents**

The proposed yellow lines do not include any loading prohibitions, which would not prevent short term parking/loading (for up to 3 hours for blue badge holders) provided this does not create an obstruction which prevents the flow of traffic, or a safety issue. Eligible residents with a Blue Badge can apply for a disabled parking bay in residential areas. It is suggested that residents engage with Thanet District Council who manage requests from Blue Badge Holders for disabled parking bays. They will be able provide advice about the prospect of a disabled parking bay being introduced near a property. Information about the process and how

to contact the relevant team at the council can be found on their website [Blue badge parking scheme & disabled parking bays - Thanet](#).

Whilst not mandatory, to enable KCC to be aware of any residents with a blue badge who live near a proposed parking restriction, we would encourage anyone in receipt of a Blue Badge, or who has registered mobility needs, to provide further information with their follow up representation (including details of their specific residence). This will enable such information to be considered and monitored by the project team.

### **Applying for Off-Road Parking**

Residents with a suitable frontage can apply for a dropped kerb to create off road parking on their property. As the Highway Authority, KCC, must determine if the installation of a dropped kerb can be done with little or no impact to the public highway by assessing factors such as the safety of motorists and pedestrians. Residents will also need to consult Thanet District Council who are responsible for local planning as some locations require planning consent. Full information about the process for applying for off road parking can be found on the Kent County Council website [KCC - highway permits and licences - apply for a dropped kerb](#).